

# Lying Down With the Dogs of Dictatorship

Ferdinand Marcos has done himself and his number one ally in Washington a seeming favor by calling a snap election for January. It temporarily takes the U.S. off the horns of a self-inflicted dilemma. It is also probably his last chance to muster a thin veneer of popular support, given the present disarray of his opposition. In no way, however, does it cure the Philippines'

## Viewpoint

by Hodding Carter III

many ills or change the fundamental nature of the American dilemma. Five Presidents have come and gone here during the long Marcos reign, and each one has managed to make such squalid common cause with him that the United States' position there may be inextricably bound up with his future.

The experience is not unique. From the Shah's Iran to Somoza's Nicaragua to Chun's South Korea to Videla's Argentina to Botha's South Africa, a consistent thread of American policy has been to lie down with any dog who knew how to bark an anti-Communist line. Inevitably, when each despot's subjects overthrew the regime, they threw us out as well, on the well-founded assumption that it was impossible to tell dog from master, master from dog. Only where we managed to distance ourselves in time, as in Argentina, were we able to escape the consequence of past folly.

But that is where one of the great jokes of international statecraft in the 20th Century takes hold. Mesmerized by our own rhetoric, which holds that the only alternative to a Chun or a Marcos is communism and chaos, we usually allow each relationship to be transformed. Ostensibly the client, the dictator becomes the patron, dispensing the favor of his indispensable pres-

ence. Ostensibly the petitioner, he instead responds benevolently to our petitions, lecturing us on his domestic and international wisdom.

That led to the spectacle of the Shah of Shahs holding forth in endless detail on geo-strategic complexities, his banalities fawningly reported by American emissaries as profound truths. That presented us with the good General Somoza, surrounded by his congressional toadies, giving lessons in Central American history. And that allowed the more frenzied of our "tough-minded" columnists to echo without qualification the Argentine junta's justifications for its war against its own people. Today, it permits some devotees of a bubble-headed Realpolitik to echo the extraordinary nonsense of a Botha that his government is all that stands between the West and destruction on the African continent.

Rather than dance to our tune, these flea-bitten mutts call it, and for a clear reason. It is a matter of right-wing dogma in this country that there is no useful alternative. If a Third World country's government is not moderately repressive, they say, it will almost certainly be a totalitarian tyranny. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. We throw our full weight behind those who claim to act in our name and thereby identify the West and democracy with bloody repression. When change comes, it is under the leadership of those who hate both democracy and the West, and they rule with the initial blessing of a majority of their countrymen.

But, continues the right-wing dogma, the U.S. "pushed" the Shah and Somoza out of power. We deserted them. It is false on both counts. Neither lacked for American arms right up to the end. Both fell because most of their subjects wanted them gone. And in both places, the U.S. was desperately maneuvering right up to the end to preserve either the person himself or the Army which enforced his rule.

The current focus of concern is the Phil-

ippines, site of what are so often labeled our "vital" air and naval bases. Having refused for years to withdraw support from the man who throttled Philippine democracy 20 years ago, Washington is finally facing inescapable reality. He and the bases are both endangered by his people's hatred and the growing success of a once ragtag communist insurgency. (Note well that neither Congress nor CIA yet claims that Moscow either controls or significantly influences the insurrection.) Grudgingly and late, Washington has been pressuring Marcos to allow orderly change.

But because we have convinced ourselves that the multibillion-dollar bases are truly vital, despite clear alternatives elsewhere in the Pacific, we remain hostage to the nature of change. No "radicals" need apply. For us, political acceptability is defined primarily by support for our military presence. In that game Marcos has the trump card. And so, even now, we dare not simply walk away from him, his collapsed economy and his brutal military lieutenants. Even now, we scramble to preserve the essence of Marcos without Marcos.

As usual, our client is craftier than those in this country who think they can pull his strings. Having announced through more than one official visitor over the years that "we love your democracy," we are stuck with his hurry-up farce of a referendum. Unable to face the implications of our own analysis of the Philippines' increasingly untenable economic and political situation, we continue to dither.

It would be ludicrous if it were not tragic. Like the people of Iran and Nicaragua the Philippines deserve far better than the alternatives we stubbornly hold out. Faced with massive popular unrest, we offer too little, too late, and lose whatever leverage we might have. Like the Bourbons of France, we neither forget history nor learn from it. In the Philippines, it grows closer to repeating itself.